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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the Botswana government's objectives and implementation strategies in the development of community secondary schools. With a population of 1.5 million and an annual growth rate of 3.5 percent, Botswana is one of the fastest growing countries in the world. Recent dramatic economic growth, largely due to diamond revenues, has not reduced poverty, and in fact, has increased inequalities between rural and urban areas. In an effort to address this problem, the government has emphasized education as the key to national development. The state's adoption of free elementary and secondary education led to massive expansion of schools between 1983 and 1993. Although the state addressed many problems resulting from such rapid expansion, the major weakness of the education system continues to be the state's domination of educational reform. An example of this is the development of community secondary schooling. The government proposed that community schools would be based on community financing and stressed community participation in school management, curriculum development, and use of school facilities. Thus far, however, community schooling has failed to improve the quality of basic education due to a number of factors: poor communication between the state and local communities; lack of financial resources for school construction, particularly in rural areas; a curriculum that disregards community needs; high illiteracy among community members; failure of teachers to consider the importance of culture in instruction; and the view that community involvement in school management is a hindrance to effective schools. (LP)

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COMMUNITY SCHOOLING AND STATE CONTROL: A DILEMMA IN THE INNOVATION AND REFORM OF BOTSWANA'S BASIC EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Background on Botswana

Botswana is a relatively large country covering 581,730 km2 or the size of France. However, most of the land is made up of sandy desert soils inadequate for crop production and the variability of rainfall makes cultivation a low rewarding activity. Irrigated agriculture has limited prospects since most of the rivers flow out of the country and make up borders to neighbouring countries. The Okavango river is a composite of a highly fragile ecological system and cannot be dredged for irrigation purposes. The country is well suited for cattle farming with a population of about 3 million cattle. The industrial sector is quite small and about 90 percent of basic commodities are imported from outside, mainly from the neighbouring South Africa.

At the time of independence, in 1966, Botswana had an estimated population of 600 000 and was counted as one of the 25 poorest countries in the world. The country's population has since greatly increased to 1.5 million and with a growing rate of 3.5% per year is one of the fastest in the world. The main factors contributing to this high growth rate are declining mortality and persistently high fertility. At present half of the population is made up of children.

During the last two decades the country had experienced dramatic economic growth largely due to diamond revenues averaged at a phenomenal rate of 10.7% annually. The country's per capita gross development product (GDP) stands at 8.8% with foreign exchange reserves amounting to $3.7, billion or P15.8 billion with an estimated value of three years of imports. At this rate of economic growth Botswana can hardly be regarded as a poor country and is rated as a developing country by the World Bank. However, national economic growth seems not to have reduced poverty but has probably increased inequality. Most of the country's wealth and development are found on urban centres whilst the rural settlements, where the majority of the population still resides, remain underdeveloped with little or no wealth creation activities except for farming. Given the existing unsupportive conditions for crop farming and the highly skewed cattle ownership, with the majority of the rural population owning very few or no cattle at all, agriculture remains a weak base for the rural economy.

Political stability has been one of the key strengths for the country. Since independence Botswana has maintained a record of holding free and fair elections every five years, with the current ruling party, the Botswana Democratic Party, having been in control of state power up to the present. The ruling elite is mostly composed of individuals of traditional aristocratic background or relations, whose wealth portfolio is mainly based on cattle and real estate. However, over the last five years the ruling party has had an infusion of

technocrats into its ranks who seem to be steadily gaining control of state power. The major factor likely to affect Botswana's political stability at present are rising unemployment and youth hooliganism as experienced in the February 1995 riots. Botswana, like most countries of the south has a very fluctuating economy easily influenced by turbulence in the global economy. Since a main strength of its economy is based on the non-renewable diamond commodity, the state emphasizes the development of its human resource as an alternative for Botswana's future development. As a result education is viewed as the key to Botswana's future development.

The state in Botswana and basic education

The state reiterates commitment towards the provision of free basic education to all the children in Botswana in its Revised National Policy on Education of 1994. Basic education in Botswana is now accepted as the first ten years of schooling (i.e. following the present period of transition, seven years primary and three years junior secondary schooling). The government has outlined the following as its goals for basic education (Ministry of Education 1992:4):

1. Prioritizing the strengthening of primary education so that all children have a firm educational foundation.
2. Nine years of education must be made available to all children.
3. Differences in educational quality between rural and urban schools must be eliminated in accordance with the principles of unity and social justice.
4. The purpose of schooling at all levels will be to prepare children for a useful, productive life in the real world. They should have the basic skills of literacy and numeracy and the knowledge that will make them self-reliant later in life.
5. Primary education will aim to make children literate, first in Setswana and then in English.

Provision of free basic education received great public support in Botswana and was viewed to signal mass opportunity for the young to rise up the social ladder, fulfilling the earlier demand, for more schools (Parsons, 1989). However, for the state, mass education symbolized its capacity to translate its goals of meeting the need of national development through the development of human resources and socializing children to loyalties of nationhood being a practical reality (National Development Plan 7 1991-1997) Ministry of Education 1994:12). The State's adoption of the free basic education policy led to a massive expansion of school places and between 1983 and 1993 the number of primary schools increased from 502 to 657 and by 1993 all primary school leavers were eligible for entry into junior secondary schools. At the same time the number of junior secondary schools increased from 42 to 186 between 1983 and 1993. It is estimated that 83% of school going children at basic education level i.e. primary and junior secondary schools

(for Botswana 7 to 13 years of age) are enrolled. This leaves 17% of Botswana's children are missing from school. As similar to most countries of the south, rapid expansion of Botswana's basic education sector did not make much consideration of efficiency and quality of the school system (Colclough and Lewin 1993: 177). In fact the Botswana National Education Commission of 1993 and the subsequent Government Paper Number 2 (Revised National Policy on Education) consider the major challenges facing the rapid expansion of Botswana's schools as: gender inequality, declining quality education, inequitable access to schooling with particular reference to the missing 17% of the children, most of whom have been identified as children of remote rural minorities (Kann et al 1989), providing a curriculum more oriented towards the realities of life in Botswana and the world of work and reducing the costs of education through cost sharing and cost-effectiveness; improving the response of schools to the needs of different ethnic groups in the society and to improve the partnership between the school and community in the development of education. It can be noted that such admission by the Botswana government on the problems inherent in its implementation of basic education may symbolize a positive outlook some developing states of the south have in adopted towards reform of their education systems to improve efficiency. However, the major weakness for Botswana, as has been the case with other developing countries (Demery 1994: 33) is that the state tends to be too dominating and corporalist in the formulation and implementation of its reforms. This leaves less opportunity for participation and input into such development initiatives by other stakeholders as the private sector and local communities.

Community junior secondary schooling was identified by the National Policy on Education of 1977 as one of the key reforms towards improving Botswana's basic education. Almost two decades since implementation of this policy reform, it is evident that Botswana's basic education provision, although a success in terms of infrastructural development (with an increase of over 170 new junior secondary schools!) has not been able to meet the demands of quality, access, relevance and providing a cost-effective education.

Community Schooling as Reform

The Partnership in Education Policy strongly emphasizes the significance of community participation in education towards establishment and management of community junior secondary schools. These schools were expected to allow majority if not all the children the opportunity to have equal access to secondary education at least up to the Junior Certificate level. The Policy indicates reasons for community involvement in education as follows:

1. To make the community feel responsible and committed to the efficient running of the school.
2. To enrich the curriculum by incorporating local variants brought in by the community.
3. To reduce the distance between the home and the school, hence remove the need of boarding accommodation at the school.
4. To allow the community access to school facilities for its other education and non-educational activities.
5. To enable the community a share in the cost of providing secondary education in the country (Ministry of Education 1984)

The policy represents a major reform of Botswana's local community initiatives on education provision which date back to pre-colonial time. The first school in Botswana was built in 1847 at Kolobeng through a church community initiative. It was based on this first initiative that communities around Botswana utilised local resources to establish their own "national schools" naming them after their tribal chiefs (Swartland and Taylor, 1986). However, it would be interesting to note that at the time schools were mostly established to provide an opportunity for the young (mostly from aristocratic families) to acquire reading and writing skills and to study the Bible.

The new type of community junior secondary school, although based on the already existing practice of community financing of schooling went further to include, participation in school management, involvement in curriculum development and use of school facilities as additional features of community participation (Ministry of Education). Since these schools are also the final stage of basic education provision the state planned their construction within reach in major population centres around the country. This commitment resulted in cost implications for establishing these schools particularly for the rural communities (estimated to be about 79% of the nation population) who are mostly poor. The Partnership in Education policy appears to have been consistent largely with the World Bank's and International Monetary Fund's development agendas for developing countries which tend to link development with empowerment. However, very little consideration seems to have been made on such factors as prevailing social and economic conditions, literacy levels, community views on what are 'own' development needs as well as the corresponding political will and administrative capacity of the developing state to make development through partnership efficient and effective. As such, although provision of free basic education for all was a universally accepted idea, the state-community partnership later faced problems at

implementation. Several studies conducted on Botswana's community schooling for basic education (Tshireletso and Kann, 1987; Tshireletso, 1989; and Tsayang, 1987) indicate that the low success of community schooling can be attributed to the very centralized nature of the state with a tendency of overextending itself in all development projects and a less informed , in some instances illiterate, poverty stricken population.

The Failure of the Reform and State Control

A number of factors have led to the poor implementation of community schooling which has had insignificant impact on the effectiveness and quality of basic education so far . Some of these are:

1. poor communication between the state and local communities on the partnership policy resulting with local communities not able to know or understand their role in the partnership.
2. lack of strong financial base for communities particularly those in rural areas to meet the costs of building community junior secondary schools.
3. the centralized school curriculum which provides less opportunity for consideration of community life needs and culture of rural ethnic minorities in particular.
4. illiteracy among some members of the school Boards of Governors, with some lacking knowledge and experience of management.
5. the inability of teachers (mainly due to lack of training) at these schools to appreciate culture and life conditions of communities they work in and to use the community as a resource for classroom instruction.
6. the bureaucratic attitudes of most school heads to school management who view community involvement in the running of community junior secondary schools as interference in a professional domain.

The lack of effective communication on collaborative aspects of community schooling to local communities by the state can be as a result of the following reasons. Firstly it can be attributed to the state's lack of political will to publicise the policy of partnership to local communities as part of its corporatist character (Molutsi and Holms, 1993) of initiating policies on its own, persuading and not consulting the stakeholders, and dominating the communication process. Lack of communication can also be the result of inadequate manpower capacity within the Ministry of Education to cover a countrywide information campaign on the new policy. The ministry has no fully developed information or public relations office.

Although Botswana is rated as a relatively wealthy state, poverty is prevalent in the countryside where the majority of the people still depend on agriculture based economic activities for wealth creation. It came as no surprise then that most people indicated their condition of poverty as the main reason for inability to finance the construction of the new community junior secondary schools. In addition to poverty, it is becoming evident that most of the Batswana communities are losing the long tradition of self-help initiative, which among others, saw the mushrooming of schools during the pre-independence period. This attitude may have been influenced largely by the state's adoption of welfare policies such as Namola Leuba (Famine Relief), Tribal Land Grazing Policy, Agricultural Land Development Policy, Financial Assistance Policy, etc., which generously subsidize individuals to develop their economic base but has at the same time greatly eroded their spirit of self-help initiative. In some isolated cases, lack of contribution to the school project was influenced by the politics of school mapping where community members would refuse to contribute for a school to be constructed in a neighbouring village.

Community schooling in a board sense is expected to meet the educational needs of the community (McNeil, 1985). Improving the relations between the school and the community is viewed as an aspect of relevance in education (Sinclair with Lillis, 1980). It is probably in view of providing basic education as relevant education, preparing the young for life, that the Partnership in Education Policy (Ministry of Education, 1984) refers to enriching the curriculum of community schools with local variants brought in by the community. However the introduction of local variants into the local community school curriculum has not been adequately implemented from perspectives of decentralization of the curriculum and preparedness of teachers to effect this change. It is the view of Teachers that the curriculum is pre-determined for them and is too rigid to allow much local variants into it (Tshireletso, 1989). This seems to corroborate Fuller's (1991:110) opinion that the teacher's role in the developing countries can be viewed as an actor who expresses the central state's agenda through official curriculum, language and moral lessons sanctioned by political elites. So an implementation of a decentralized curriculum could not have been possible as it presented a contradiction to the state's agenda of providing mass schooling as a means of socializing the young to state authority and modernity (Republic of Botswana, 1994:12). At the same time teachers have not been prepared for this innovation as most of them view involvement of parents as partners in classroom teaching as an invasion of their professional area (Tshireletso, 1989).

This apparent lack of responsiveness by the basic education curriculum to life needs and challenges at village community level present one of the shortcomings on its quality and relevance. Since about 79% of people in Botswana are from rural areas, the curriculum of community junior secondary schools also needs to take into consideration the challenges of rural development. The curriculum should develop an appreciation for life in rural areas among the pupils. The learners should also be made aware of the potential of rural areas especially by exploring the capacity of commercial production of veld products and agriculture which are the main economic resource for rural areas. However, this is not to suggest that educational relevance should concern itself only with the learning of practical skills. There needs to be a balance between the learning of practical "hand" skills and study of traditional academic subjects, in order for basic education to prepare the young for the world of work and further education. Although Botswana is striving to maintain such a balance at community junior secondary school level, practical subjects offered are not made flexible enough to accommodate life needs of Botswana rural communities. As an example, the Design and Technology syllabus is more concerned with the practical needs of urban communities, with its teaching of simple electrical safety, wiring of plugs, replacing tap washers etc. most of which are not a common feature in rural community life.

A Bureaucratic State With A Decentralized Education Agenda

The state in Botswana, like in most sub-Saharan countries maintains a bureaucratic style of running its affairs. However, an additional character of the Botswana government over the years has been its stability and centrist approach. It seems to have preference for overextending itself in all areas of economic activity and shows reluctance towards decentralization. According to DegeFe (1994) most states of the sub-Saharan Africa would do better in their efforts of developing their peoples by disengaging themselves from the common activities and focusing their strengths on new areas of development. Although education is viewed by developing countries like Botswana as key to national development, too much domination of the education sector by the state leaves other stakeholders out of participation. To most African governments, control in the education sector is viewed as a means of nation building (Fuller, 1991:138). As a result it is with less enthusiasm that most of these governments would implement policies which imply 'power sharing' or giving away some of their power and responsibilities. At the same time the uncompromising attitudes of most school heads and teachers towards the implementation of decentralization at school level further perpetuate the problem. This scenario leaves communities especially those in rural areas with less influence over what goes on in the classroom. Already as indicated earlier, other factors such as lack of management skills, high incidence of poverty and illiteracy limit participation of most rural people in community schooling.

It can be observed then that community schools have existed just by name as there seems to be less community influence in these schools and more state dominance and control. A factor which has actually made the state to officially rename most of these schools as 'Government Aided Community Junior Secondary Schools' thereby reasserting its control.

Implications For A Postmodern Alternative For Botswana's Basic Education

The idea of education beyond or without state control is likely to be viewed as a recipe for chaos by most government in sub-Saharan Africa. However, the negative effects of state dominance on education do present a challenge for change. As a result of stringent bureaucratic state control, mass schooling has perpetuated mass inequalities, a general decline of education standards and a high drop out rate of youth not well prepared to face the realities of life outside school.

Although Botswana in the mid 1980s was shifting its basic education schools system towards less state control, encouraging community partnership, the state steadily consolidated its control within a decade, a rather surprising move as observed by Watson (1995:4). However, the gradual backtracking towards state control of the education sector in Botswana seems to have been influenced largely by existence of mostly socio-economically and even politically week communities and a state reluctant to give away control. This has adversely affected the development of Botswana's basic education particularly its quality and response to national development needs.

It is not quite easy to determine which are the best development strategies for Sub-Saharan Africa. However, participation by local people themselves in all spheres concerning their development seems to be the most appealing as it ensures empowerment of even the most peripheral groups and ensures that development reach them (Stewart, 1994). Prescriptive formulas for development originating from such international concerns as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and even from the bureaucratic state itself intended to develop Sub-Saharan African communities have so far recorded a low success rate. As a result, education as a key development strategy for most of these countries, needs to emphasize on increasing equity and efficiency of development programmes through participation by local communities.

Conclusion

Although community participation had been viewed as a means of forging closer school and community relations through the government sponsored 'Partnership in Education Policy' — this has not bee realised. The Revised National Policy on Education (Botswana, 1994) makes further reference to school and community relations as an area that needs to

be consolidated further in the education system. However, it makes less consideration of issues that have so far made improved school and community relations a far fetched reality. As already mentioned in this paper, several constraints have made community participation in the 'Partnership in Education Policy' less effective, the most notable being: lack of finance capacity, high level of illiteracy particularly for most rural communities and a lack of political will on the part of the state to involve local communities in the different aspects of the school. As a result the initial community junior secondary school concept has been reduced to a 'Government Aided Junior Secondary School', a new official term used to refer to these schools. As a result community 'ownership' of these schools has been eroded and exists now in practice but not in name, and instead state control has been perpetuated. This leaves Botswana as one of the few remaining developing countries with an inclination towards a centralised, state controlled education system. What further implications this has for the country's basic education provision remains to be seen. It however, suffices to note at this juncture that quality and relevance issues in relation to Botswana's basic education remain central, with a particular reference on how these influence employment of youth out of the formal school system, and how the youth are able to fit into the society.

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